A CLOSE EXAMINATION OF THE SIRI LANKAN BUDDHIST FUNERAL PRACTICE OF PĀNSŬKŬLA

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INTRODUCTION

Pānsŭkŭla is assumed as a unique religious funeral practice in Siri Lanka by a majority of traditional Buddhists. When a Buddhist dies, the family and friends get together and offer to the lead monk a *pānsŭkŭla*, which is a brand-new piece of white cloth (5 – 6 meters). The lead monk performs this religious rite as the very last activity for the departed individual shortly before the body is taken out of the house or the funeral pallor for cremation or for burial. On the one hand it is believed that *pānsŭkŭla* offering helps the dead individual to find a better placement in afterlife or attain *Nibbāna*. On the other, survivors feel that their grief and trauma are relieved when they have done the ultimate noble deed for the departed. In light of these observations, it appears that giving *pānsŭkŭla* subsequent to the death of a loved one is not only to ensure a better outcome for the departed by those who survived but also an expectation of the person prior to his/her death that any residual bad *kamma* will be lifted by *pānsŭkŭla* offering. Its interesting to note, according to many descriptions, *pānsŭkŭla* is one of the thirteen *dŭthānga* observed by hindu y*ogis* and *paribrājika* who live by challenging the

extremes as a way to reach divinity (*moksha*). Though giving *pānsŭkŭla* upon death of an individual is considered an undeniable essential religious rite for the departed among Siri Lankan Buddhists, its intriguing to note that there is hardly any mention of this among the thousands of *Sŭttas* in the *Tripitaka*. Then, it can be argued that *pānsŭkŭla* practice in Siri Lanka is more of a socio-cultural funeral practice rather than an essential religious last rite. Therefore, this paper aims to explore the concept of *pānsŭkŭla* from a religio-social perspective, its current expectations, and how *pānsŭkŭla* provides a silver lining to the survivors to find true relief while engaging in *kŭsalassa ŭpasampadā*, the noblest activity for their own mental purity in any Buddha era.

WHAT IS PĀNSŬKŬLA?

Pānsŭkŭla had been an ancient funeral practice which was part of brahmana religions that existed in *Siv Helaya* even before the era of the Buddha *Gothama*. When a person died in ancient *Siv Helaya*, the corpse had been wrapped in the best cloths left behind by the departed. Then the wrapped corpse was disposed in the woods for natural decay. Only rich people such as Royals and counts in ancient *Helabima* earned a

cremation. But the common masses followed the *pānsŭkŭla* as described earlier. This wrapped cloth was known as *pānsŭkŭla.*

Pānsŭkŭla is a *Hela* Magadhi/*Pāli* term that can be defined as follows. *Pānsŭ* means soil or dirt. *Kŭla* means a category, a cast, a fraction, or a portion. Thus, the term *pānsŭkŭla* denotes a soiled fraction or a soiled portion. If it is applied to a cloth, then it means a soiled cloth, or a dirty cloth. This Magadhi term is misinterpreted in many internet sites. (For example, *pānsŭkŭla* is presented erroneously in the internet as "*pamsukūla*", which is defined as follows: *pamsu*" = "dust" or "disgust"; "*ula*" is "to arrive" (www.wisdomlib.org). Translations often appear to be misleading particularly when translated out of context or without having an in-depth understanding of Magadhi or *Sinhala* languages. In the Buddha *dæsanā* disgust means "*dvæsha*", a mental defilement. Then, such an interpretation as "disgusting *cheevara*" makes no sense with regards to *pānsŭkŭla.*

Pānsŭkŭla in original Magadhi had been interpreted in the Buddha *dæsanā* in relation to *pānsŭkŭla cheevara* or robe. In the Buddha era, clothing was not a commodity and was not as abundantly available as it is today. In that era, rich people had

several sets of clothing for personal use whereas common masses had them as bare necessities. Therefore, Buddha *srāvakas,* unlike today, had to find a way to secure a usable robe as a necessity because robes (*cheevara*) had never been a commodity in ancient *Hela* society. However, Buddhas srāvakas found material for robes from unlikely places.

Its interesting to note that in ancient *Helabima*, dead bodies had not been buried. Yet, there had been an established practice by commoners for the disposal of the dead bodies where the corpse had been wrapped with the best cloth left behind by the departed and subsequently the cloth wrapped corpse was placed near the riverbank or in the woods. This process was known as the "dead being heaved in the woods" or (*kāle gāheema*). This left the option to find raw material for a robe from unlikely places such as forested areas or riverbanks.

PĀNSŬKŬLA AS PARISHKĀRA (PIRIKARA)

Evidence for the practice of leaving the corpses in the woods can be derived from the *Navaseevathika Pabba* of the *Mahā Satara Sathipattāna Sŭtta.* These soiled cloths had been

nobody's property once thrown out with the corpse and thus there would be no conflict with *vinaya*. According to Buddha decree, such soiled cloths can be picked up by Buddha *srāvakas* perhaps by transferring *pañña* energy to the departed: then cleaned them properly with herbal and plant saps available in the *Deva Hela* forests not only for cleansing but also for disinfection.

Once the cloth is cleansed, it was cut into pieces known as "*kada*". The sizes of these pieces are indicated in the following illustration, excluding worn out or torn spots. The width of a piece of cloth for the robe remains limited to 4 ft though some are made a little larger. The "*kada*" that make the robe when seamed together looks like a paddy field suggesting all the robes look alike. These robes must be prepared with at least 5 long strips stitched together with subdivisions on each strip. In this manner a robe can be fabricated without causing any new debt relationship with anything or with anyone

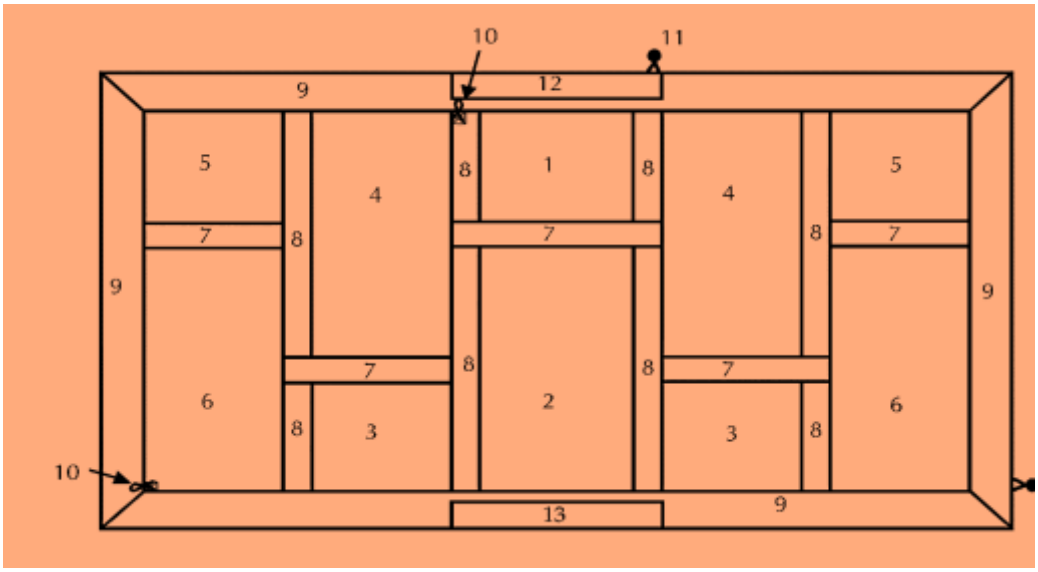

Figure 1: Structural plan of a robe that will be stitched together with pieces of *pānsŭkŭla* cloths.

(*vinaya = no naya-ganŭdenŭwa*). Usually, there is a border as indicated in the above illustration. Once the robe is sewn, it had to be dipped in a liquid made of herbal material (dye). The robe dye is allowed to be obtained from six kinds of substances: roots, tubers, plants, bark, leaves, flowers, and fruits. They should be boiled in water for long enough to secure the dye. Saffron and ochre (from the jackfruit's heartwood) are the colors often used (www.buddhanet.net); though there is a tendency amongst forest monks to wear ochre – saddle brown color (RBG color code) and city monks to wear saffron. In the Buddha *dæsanā*, it is referred to as "*pandŭ peveema*", a *Sinhala* term for dyeing the robe. This liquid

will dye the robe camouflaging all the stains which existed in the soiled cloth. The robe dyeing by Buddha *srāvakas* still follows this natural route in Siri Lanka as it was done in ancient *Helabima* and there is even evidence to show the power of some dyes having anti-bacterial effects according to research conducted by the University of *Moratuwa* (2012).

This robe is now useable and such robes had been worn by Buddha *srāvakas* until they fall apart into fragments due to decay. At that point it will be used as a bed spread, as a wind

Figure 2: Pandŭ Orŭwa (wooden dyeing container): Dyeing of a robe by the use of Jack fruit bark extraction boat. Photo Courtesy: Daily News, October 2, 2012.

shield followed by using as a rug and thereafter it will be used to make the mud wall of the *kŭti* where they lived. This is

how a *pānsŭkŭla* robe had been put to use by the Buddha *srāvakas* in the era of the Buddha *Gothama* in *Helabima*.

In light of the above facts, a *pānsŭkŭla cheevara* is a robe that had been crafted according to ancient traditions by Buddha *srāvakas* themselves without the help of laymen. However, the crafting of *pānsŭkŭla cheevara* has changed its course due to known and unknown factors over 2 millennia and today the robes are commercially manufactured. At present, there is hardly any evidence that these *pānsŭkŭla* cloths are used to make robes as robes are commercially produced en mass. This means a *pānsŭkŭla* white cloth *cheevara* is most probably not used for the intended purpose. The *dāyaka* and members of a given temple offer multiple robes to each monk. The number of robes received by monks as gifts (*parishkāra* – items given to Buddha *srāvakas* for their personal use) is numerous and it gives rise to problems of storage and the number of robes that can be worn by a Buddha *srāvaka*. Moreover, if the *pirikara* is not accepted, the *dāyaka* becomes very unhappy. When a multitude of *dāyaka* offer robes to the same temple or to the same group of monks due to the competition among the *dāyaka*, the monks are compelled to accept them and later

sell these robes back to vendors as a way to get rid of them. This is how *dāyaka* groups transform monks into merchants or traders. Remove the blinds of your eye and evaluate who is pushing the monks over the edge.

There is another aspect that must be distinguished in terms of *pānsŭkŭla cheevara.* A *pānsŭkŭla cheevara* is not to get mixed up with *Katina cheevara*. *Katina cheevara* can be crafted according to the above illustration and *vinaya* rules by any lay person and offer it to the Buddha *srāvaka,* who has attained *Maga-Pala* by the end of the retreat for the rainy season. In ancient *Helabima* in the Buddha era, only those who attained *Maga-Pala* during a *Vas* retreat were qualified to receive a *katina cheevara.*

PĀNSŬKŬLA AS A GIFT FOR THE DEPARTED

Once a Buddhist has died, friends and family organize an offering of a white cloth adequate for a robe to the leading monk of the funeral service before the body is removed from home or the funeral pallor. This is an adaptation of the ancient version of *pānsŭkŭla* robe into modern times. In the era of the Buddha, there was no *pānsŭkŭla* robe offering as a religious rite on behalf of the dead. There is no mention in the *Tripitaka*

that the Buddha *Gothama* or any other Noble Buddha *Srāvaka* participated in a *pānsŭkŭla* ceremony on behalf of any dead person with or without invitation. However, contrary to ancient times, there is a function known as *pānsŭkŭla* offering for the departed in modern times. This offered cloth is called a *pānsŭkŭla*, which has to be processed into a robe as indicated above. This is known as offering of a "cloth for remembrance" (*Mathaka Wastra Pŭjā*).

This offering is followed by the chanting of the stanza:

Anićcavata sankhārā ŭppādavayadhammino
Ŭppajjithvā nirŭjjathi thesan vŭpasamosŭkho

Translation provided in access-tonight website*: "Impermanent alas are formations, subject to rise and fall Having arisen, they cease; their subsiding is bliss"* (https://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/kariyawasam/wheel402.html#ch5)

Offering and chanting by monks continue simultaneously. During the *pānsŭkŭla* chanting , the survivors of the deceased sit together with somber mood often crying engage in a water pouring ceremony from a vessel into a cup placed on a plate. Water from the vessel is poured by close family member as a group until the cup overflows. While the water is being poured, the monks chant the following stanzas, which

represents an example quoted by the Buddha when elucidating *Thirokŭdda Sŭtta*.

> *Ŭnnamæ ŭdakan vattan yathā ninnan pavathathin*
> *ævamæva ito dinnan pætānan ŭpakappathi.*
> *Yatha vārivahā pŭrā paripŭrenthi sāgaran*
> *ævamæva ito dinnan pætānan ŭpakappathi.*

Translation: Just as the water flows from a higher to a lower ground, the puññya energy transferred from here shall be received by the departed similar to the ocean receiving water from the flowing river.

This was merely an example that the Buddha used to clarify the process of transferring merits to the departed. However, the example has become the core of this ritual with gross negligence of its message. The example has turned into a ritual to satisfy the sympathy of the common masses rather than facilitating the true meaningful transfer of merits mostly in need to be received by the departed. In order for the departed to receive these needed merits, they must be transferred in accordance with the details provided in the *Thirokŭdda Sŭtta*. If the process of transfer does not run the way the Buddha elucidated, the likelihood of these *paradattŭpa jeeveen* receiving merits is highly unlikely irrespective of what one might think.

If one looks at the process with an open mind, the participating survivors keep pouring water into the cup until it spills over during the session of chanting of the above two stanzas. During this activity the participants think whether the water is adequate to fill the cup, or the chanting will be over before the cup is full and flows over, or thinking to change the pace of pouring to match the chanting speed etc. This generates a lot more anxiety provoking thoughts in one's mind during this water pouring ceremony. For a mind saddened with grief, pouring anxiety on top of it is certainly against Buddha *dæsanā*. Buddha *dæsanā* is always about extinguishing mental fires. Anxiety laden mental states hinder the merit transfer rendering this process ineffective. This means essentially, that this whole process of water pouring activity permeates conditions that hinder the transfer of merits to the departed. As a result, the departed beings can run wild and cause unsavory bouts to express their displeasure and anger as experienced by King *Bimbisāra*. This is clearly illustrated in the *Thirokŭdda Sŭtta*. Then, it can be argued that the water pouring ceremony distracts the transfer of merits to the departed. In other words, when treating the example as

the reality, the transfer of merits to the departed is doomed. This means that this present method of transferring merits by way of *pānsŭkŭla* to the departed appears as a hindrance rather than an action that would benefit the dead.

PANSUKULA AS AN OBLIGATION FOR THE SURVIVED

According to *Hela* history, there had been many times when Buddhist villagers or citizens were disinterested in associations with Buddhist temples or extending their support for their maintenance. To ensure a sustained link between temples and Buddhist public, *pānsŭkŭla* has earned its place in the Buddhist religion as an effective tool. If the departed person does not maintain a good standing with the monk or the temple, the monks have the option to disregard any invitation for the *pānsŭkŭla* of the departed person. Since such a situation could be viewed as a disgrace in socio-cultural terms, at least one or two family members maintain a good relationship with the temple essentially because of the *pānsŭkŭla*. Though this relationship with the temple appears as a healthy relationship based on religious affiliation, its purposes can be quite deceptive because there are underlying issues that would hardly be discussed in the open. If there is

no support extended to the temple, no monks will attend their funerals for giving *pānsŭkŭla* to the departed.

PĀNSŬKŬLA EXPECTATIONS

Mostly, when listening to the above chanting at *pānsŭkŭla* offerings, the survivors, or the relatives of the departed think that this religious activity will help the departed relative to attain *Nibbāna*. This is the reason that the majority of Buddhist obituary notice in Siri Lanka as well as sign boards at funeral homes in this country carry the statement "*Nivan sæpa labæva*"or May this (dead) person attains *Nibbāna*". This statement appears to be unrealistic as *Nibbāna* can be achieved only when a person is alive. Further, it appears that this kind of flawed expectations that are widespread among the Buddhist masses in Siri Lanka is a result of sheer ignorance in the *Siri Sadthdhamma* taught by the Buddha *Gothama*. Their thinking is skewed with ignorance as they are being brainwashed with illogical *Mahāyāna, Ŭpanishad* and *Pathānjali* schools of thought on reality since their childhood. These conventional Buddhists are unable to follow the Buddha's advice provided in the *Kālāmā Sŭtta* elucidated to *Kæsapŭtta Brahmins* in the State of *Kŭrŭ* or present day *Kehælpannala* near

Mawanella in the province of *Sabaragamuwa*. *Asathi* (*asathi* is without appraising this activity through *hæthŭ-pala dhamma* or *naya vinaya*) on this belief keeps them hooked up to the *pānsŭkŭla* ceremony, which in essence has little bearing on the possibility of attaining *Nibbāna* by the departed. The theory of *Nibbāna* can be understood through *Sŭtta dæsanā*. If one pursues *Nibbāna*, without at least knowing its theory, it becomes a pursuit in blind faith. Buddha *dhamma* cannot be followed blindly as it requires one to act from within and with *paññā*. Then, a dead person cannot act from within or exercise *paññā* to attain *Nibbāna*. If the process of *pānsŭkŭla* has no bearing on the attainment of *Nibbāna* by the departed, then beyond doubt such thinking can be considered by and large as delusional.

Nibbāna is defined by the Buddha as *Rāgakhāyo Nibbānan, Dveshakhāyo Nibbānan* and *Mohakhāyo Nibbānan*. When a person dies his/her *manomaya kāya* becomes dormant until a new birth sparks new *viñãna* energy. A dormant *manomaya kāya* can never engage in *rāgakhāyo, dveshakhāyo* and *mohakhāyo Nibbānan* activity. Only a living human or a divine being with *Sammā Ditty* can deracinate all *kilæsa* by *rāgakhāyo, dveshakhāyo*

and *mohakháyo* and attain *Nibbāna*. *Sammā ditty* is characterized by true comprehension that existence (*pævæthma*), which until now had been accepted as *nichcha, sŭkha* and *aththa* is nothing but *anichcha, dukkha* and *anaththa* in reality. In light of this knowledge one must rethink about the process of *pānsŭkŭla* and the expectations with regards to *Nibbāna* in terms of reality rather than engaging in fantasy. This is the bitter truth about what is being done en mass.

There is hardly any evidence to support that this practice or this tradition of *pānsŭkŭla* did exist in *Helabima* until recent times. It appears that this practice which is common in *Hindu* and *Ŭpanishad* religions found an entrance into the Siri Lankan Buddhist practices approximately between the *Anŭrājapŭra* era subsequent to Brahmin *Bŭddhagosa* and the beginning of *Polonnaruwa* era.

A SILVERLINING WITH PĀNSŬKŬLA

Instead of continuing with the practice of *pānsŭkŭla* as a rite and a ritual, this practice needs to be analyzed from different perspectives to understand its adoptability for yielding true benefits.

On the one hand this practice can be effectively applied to generate and transmit *puñña energy* to the departed while providing relief to the survivors that they have done their best. To be effective, this practice has to be accomplished with a *niklæshi* (free of *rāga, dvæsha* and *moha*) mind. Furthermore, if applied precisely, survivors can simultaneously pay off to some extent, if not all *samsāric* debt owing to the departed and set the departed free and having achieved freedom from *samsāric* debt.

On the other hand, *pānsŭkŭla* can be translated into an opportunity for grieving survivors to accomplish *kŭsalassa ŭpasampadā*, not only by transmitting *puñña energy* and getting rid of *puññyabhisankhāra* but also engaging in *maranānŭssathi*, which is the Noblest action along the path of the *dhamma* to secure *Nibbāna*. Transmittance of *puñña energy* to the departed removes sheaths of *kamma* due to *puññyabhisankhāra* that shields the attainment of *Nibbāna*.

In this context, re-examination of the stanza with its true meaning in line with the Buddha *dæsanā* is of utmost importance. A more precise translation of the previous stanza

Anićcavata sankhāra ŭppādavayadhammino

Ŭppajjithvā nirŭjjathi thesan vŭpasamo sŭkho

must read as follows:

> *"All sankhāra (actions based on san intentions) can never be upheld as one desires because what is generated inevitably transforms until peril. Deracination of san (thesan =rāga, dvæsha and moha associations) based relationships lead to sŭkha or boundless unparalleled happiness".*

The chanting of the above stanza is intended to provide insight to the grieving survivors of the departed. This is a reminder that one must commence with deracinating *san* immediately as the burrowed time on earth as a human being (*manŭssaththa patilābho,* a rarity*)* could come to an end sooner than later and one has to be ready when the call comes. Thus, this activity of chanting is not a consolation for the survivors but a stark reminder to them of what need to be done to alleviate *dukkha* or *samsāric* afflictions forever. Realistically this happens only if the grieving parties understand the meaning of the stanza and follow instantly (*pachŭppattithā hothi*) with what it recommends.

However, as the *pānsŭkŭla* cloth is being offered, if survivors can generate minds free of defilements (*niklæshi* mind), *puññya* energy or merits generated (*puññya kamma*) become blended with the vibrations of the *manomaya kāya* (mental energy) of the departed if born in a *paradattŭpa* state of existence (*bŭtha,*

pætha and *deva* realms). Unless this activity is performed with a mind free of *rāga, dvæsha* and *moha* (*niklæshi*) with maximum mental radiance, the anticipated result remains insignificant. When transferring merits to the departed, according to the *Thirokŭdda Sŭtta*, which was elucidated by the Buddha to King *Bimbisāra* at his Palace in *Rajagahanŭwara*, the paramount importance of the mind free of *san* or *niklæshi* mind is illustrated in this process. The merits transmitted through mental states tainted by *san* (lamenting - confused or *soka-paridæva*, unpleasant and depressed or *dukkha-domanassa* minds) can never be received by the departed even if he/she is in a receptive state of existence according to laws of nature.

If the departed relative is born spontaneously (*opapātika*) into the realms of dependence from others (*paradattŭpa jeeveen* including six *Sugathi realm,* one *Bŭtha,* and one *Pætha* realm) and the merits are transferred as recommended by the Buddha, they can receive them in full and improve their predicament whatever it may be. If a departed is born into the human realm, animal realm, *niraya* realm or in any of the 20 *brahma* realms out of the 31 planes of existence, they cannot receive any merits.

However, these merits if transferred to the departed as recommended, always result in a positive outcome no matter whether they can receive it or not. Once one transfers one's own accrued merits to any departed relatives whether in this current life or in past lives, it helps one to pay off *samsāric* debts incurred in actions which occurred between those departed and the person who engages in this transfer. Whether they can receive it or not, transfer of merits compensates *samsāric* debts that existed until now between the departed and the relative who transferred merit. This process sets the debtor free of *samsāric* debts in that relationship. If this whole process is carried out precisely as the Buddha recommended in the *Thirokŭdda Sŭtta*, it leads to the fulfilment of one's *kŭsala dhamma*. Therefore, instead of following this ritual blindly, one is able to gain some noble results in term of paying *samsāric* debts with *puññya* energy that one has accrued in the process. Offering *puññya* energy to the departed can be accomplished only by human beings. This is not only a noble human capacity but also an opportunity that comes with one's birth into this rarity of *manŭssaththa patilābho*. The Buddha demonstrated this by example after the second

dāna at the Palace of King *Bimbisāra*. Since one is born into human realm in this life, these opportunities such as *pānsŭkŭla* can be used to pay off *samsāric* debts wherever they are due and alleviate hindrances to *Nibbāna* by removing sheaths of *kamma* (*kammāvarana*).

Pānsŭkŭla activity, as it is known or otherwise, is not mentioned in the *Tripitaka*. Thus, it is worth examining why it has never been part of Buddha *dhamma* though it represents a fundamental building block in the psyche of current *Hela* Buddhists. *Pānsŭkŭla* offering is popular only among *Hela* Buddhists and not in a significant manner in any other Buddhist country.

According to www.buddhanet.net, in Buddhism, "death marks the transition from this life to the next for the deceased. Death is the opportunity for the deceased to transition into a new realm of existence in the cycle of rebirths. Further, this website indicates when death occurs, all the *kammic* forces accrued during this life become activated and determine the next rebirth. For the living, according to this website, death is a powerful reminder of the Buddha's teaching on impermanence; it also provides an opportunity to assist the

deceased person as he or she proceeds on to the new existence". Langer (2007) asserts that *Vedic Sŭttas*, *Brahmanas*, and *Ŭpanishad* formed the cultural and religious backdrop of Buddhism and Hinduism. If this had been a practice in *Helabima*, it would at least be noted even briefly in *Pāli atŭvās*. However, such prescriptive details are absent from *Pāli atŭvās* according to Langer (2007). This author further asserts that the origins of transferring merits to the departed became the main feature of Siri Lankan funeral practices indicating the inclusiveness expressed in Buddhism. According to Langer (2007), these Siri Lankan funeral practices can be traced back to the *Ŭpanishad*. In light of these findings, it becomes clear that the funeral practices of *Hela* Buddhists as they are known today had been originated in Indian *Vedic* and *Ŭpanishad* schools of thought. However, based on the knowledge from *Tripitaka Sŭttas* such as *Thirokŭdda Sŭtta*, transferring merits had been included into the process at some point making the *pānsŭkŭla* ceremony uniquely Siri Lankan.

Suppose if *pānsŭkŭla* had been done during the era of the Buddha, and if Buddha had attended any funeral home of a close relative, for example a member of the *Shākya* clan, then

HE certainly would have elucidate a *Sŭtta* to indicate the significance of offering white clothes or a *pānsŭkŭla cheevara* to HIM including the *Mahā Sangha*. Then, such a *Sŭtta* of high significance would certainly had been documented either in early *Hela atŭvās*, *Vibhanga-Prakaranaya*, in the *Tripitaka*, or in any ancient *Hela* chronicles such as *Mahāvansa* or *Deepavansa* etc. There is hardly any historic written or archeological evidence to show that the Buddha participated in any funeral services or appreciated such activities. One thing that can be argued beyond reasonable doubt is that the Buddha spent every second of HIS life only to help human and divine (*deva*) beings to secure their attainment of *Nibbāna*. The Buddha's mission was to teach those who are alive. For this reason, the Buddha never lost a single second of HIS life as the *Sammā Sambuddha* on meaningless activities. However, HE recommended the transfer of merits or *puñña* energy to the departed to pay off the *samsāric* debts and extrapolated it as an illustration of how this activity can be turned into *kŭsala dhamma* (*puñña-pāpa pahienassa*) conducive to the attainment of *Nibbāna*. Essentially, *kŭsala* means getting rid of both *puñña* and *pāpa* leaving no *abhisankhāra* related to them. This

is *kŭsalassa* or *āna*. *Ŭpasampadā* means liberating the mind of *san* associations (*rāga, dvæsha* and *moha*) by clarifying and uprooting them from the *ćitta santhānaya* or *pāna*. Essentially *kŭsalassa ŭpasampadā* is in brief *āna pāna sathi samādhi bhāvanā* or exercising *chatŭrārakkhā* in the times of need.

CONCLUSION

Funeral practices whether Buddhist or otherwise appear to be rather a religio-cultural aspect than any thing else. When *Mahāyāna* Buddhism arrived on the shores of *Helabima* from India, *Ŭpanishad* cultural and religious aspects influenced religio-cultural practices in Siri Lanka. These influences formed the basis of current Buddhist funeral practices, which include *pānsŭkŭla* offering as discussed throughout this essay. In ancient *Helabima* at the time of the Buddha, dead bodies had been wrapped in a best cloth left behind by the departed and the wrapped corpse was placed in a forest or left on a riverbank for nature to take over. When left out in the woods, *Navaseevathika Pabba* in the *Mahā Satara Sathipattāna Sŭtta* illustrates precisely what happens to it as a reminder to the living, of the absolute reality, as means to deracinate *san*-based association with *panchaskandha* to avoid formation of

panchŭpādanaskanda that lead to existential afflictions. This step of *kāyækāyānupassanā* conditions one to avert grasping of *panchaskandha* through penetrative comprehension of *anichcha, dukkha* and *anaththa* by replacing the conditioned *nichcha, sŭkha* and *attha*. This specific mental conditioning process aids the attainment of *Nibbāna*. Then, essentially, it is a lively activity for living humans. However, Buddhist religious funeral practices that are carried out for namesake do not guide the survivor on the above prescribed path to *Nibbāna* rather they are aimed to encourage the departed to attain *Nibbāna*, which is a task impossible. This significant difference in Buddhist funeral practices in *Helabima* compared to Indian models is the transferring of merits to the departed. This appears to be the only *Siri Sadthdhamma* element that got infused into *Hela* Buddhist funeral practices. The present-day Buddhist funeral practices in *Helabima* are more of a cultural presentation rather than a religious activity.

Siri Sadthdhamma is the pristinely pure Buddha *dæsanā* that provides a precise pathway to attain *Nibbāna*, which must be attained when one is alive and not when one is on death bed or after death. The path to *Nibbāna* in reality is analogous to

an algorithm that provides resolutions if followed precisely. This path leads to the complete liberation from *san*-based afflictions. Thus, it can be achieved by a living human being or a divine being but not in any way a process prescribed for the departed. However, the *pānsŭkŭla* and related cultural practices, though enacted within the envelop of religion, is not necessarily a part of the pristinely pure Buddha *dhamma*. It is obviously a part and parcel of Buddhism, the religion, and an invaluable contributor for the continuation of *samsāric* existence rather than ending it. The transferring of merits is the only element that is burrowed from the pristinely pure *dhamma*, and that too must be executed precisely as prescribed by the Buddha. If not, it will lose its effect on the departed. Therefore, by taking a close look at *pānsŭkŭla* and the possibilities around this practice, this whole practice can be transformed and adopted for the benefit of the many in times of need. By realigning the *pānsŭkŭla* practice as a practice toward *kŭsalassa ŭpasampadā* or *chatŭrārakkhā* or into a true *āna pāna sathi samādhi bhāvanā*, it will bring immense benefits for all in order to be liberated from *samsāric* afflictions not only in this life but for eternity.

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